Union of Students in Ireland
Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn

Combating Cyberbullying in Third Level

2017-2020

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About USI

"The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) fights to protect and strives to enhance the student experience. USI is the sole national representative body for students in Ireland with over 250,000 members across 30 colleges. Throughout our history, USI has worked relentlessly in the pursuit of student rights in all areas and raising awareness in all areas of the student experience".

Objectives of the Union of Students' in Ireland:

1. An education and training system open to all, irrespective of any consideration, including consideration of national origin, ethnic background, age, ability, sex, sexuality, creed, political beliefs or economic circumstances, so that each individual can realize their full potential.

2. An education and training system which truly serves the interest of the people of Ireland.

3. The right of students to a decent standard of living including the right to adequate financial support, proper housing and future prospects of employment in Ireland.

4. The defense and promotion of all democratic and human rights.

5. The provision of student services for the benefit of the membership on the principle that control of student service should lie with the membership.

6. To represent the interests of the students if Ireland at international level.

Background of the policy

With increasing use of social media there are more risks for young people to become targets, victims or even aggressors of cyber-bullying. Technology's progression is often equated with the advancement of human societies and in turn has changed the way people interact. This is not always a positive thing as we look at how traditional bullying has evolved into an issue today known as cyber-bullying. While traditional bullying has been studied at length in recent years, it is evident there is currently less known about cyber-bullying (Donegan, 2012). Cyber-bullying has been defined as ''wilful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, phones, and other electronic devices'' (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Donegan also observed that, unlike traditional bullying, cyber-bullying allows the offender to mask his or her identity behind a computer. This anonymity makes it easier for the offender to strike blows against a victim without having to see the victim's physical response.

Now more than ever with the evolution of social media, apps such as Snapchat make it quicker and easier to share media than ever before. Facebook with their many sub groups and instant messaging, it is now commonplace to share media in an instant. Objectification of social media personas, user content and contact information have become rampant, with college groups such as "Bird of the Day", apps such as "Yik Yak" and the anonymity that comes with it has given users more power to share information and media without consequence.

The online sphere has become a free for all and without proper education and legislation, it will continue have devastating effects on victims of online harassment, cyber bullying (anonymous or otherwise) and revenge porn.

Revenge Porn

Revenge porn, also known as non-consensual pornography, is when someone distributes sexual images or videos of another person, without the permission or consent of that person. It might be done by a partner or ex-partner, a friend, colleague, or hacker.

Social Media is the single most used medium for the transfer of images and videos that constitute revenge porn. Revenge porn can have a detrimental effect on the person/persons mental state and is a direct breach of their consent to share such media.

Legislation

With the lack of specific legislation around revenge porn and online harassment, it is important to seek effective legislation to deal with issues that are arising from cyber bullying and revenge porn.

As it stands it currently falls under the heading of harassment, which is legislated for in Section 10 of the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act (1997).

Section 10 states:
(1) Any person who, without lawful authority or reasonable excuse, by any means including by use of the telephone, harasses another by persistently following, watching, pestering, besetting or communicating with him or her, shall be guilty of an offence.

Data

According to the Central statistics office(2015) there was 451 recorded suicides, down 8 from the previous year. This resulted in the suicide rate dropping from 10 to 9.7 per 100,000 of the population.

Nevertheless, the rate has actually increased across all regions except Leinster which has the highest population density. These figures also show a disparity in terms of urban versus rural areas.

For example there were no recorded suicides in Waterford city in 2015, the suicide rate in Co Waterford more than doubled from 8.8 in 2014 to 19 last year.

A similar difference was evident in Co Galway, where the rate jumped from 10.2 to 17.4 compared to a more modest increase in the city, where it rose from 11.1 in 2014 to 12.7

last year. The suicide rate in Limerick city dipped to 16 from 23 in 2014, while the rate more than doubled in county Limerick, up to 12.7 from 5.2 in 2014.

In recent years Irish media highlighted a number of cases where Irish teenagers died by suicide in what is suspected as possible results of cyberbullying. Following key objectives of USI's Mental Health Strategy 2014-2017 'More Talk More Action' ' it is imperative that USI keeps suicide prevention as a key objective and aims to make "college communities safe and suicide aware for all students". There needs to be awareness and education among young people in relation to how the words which they say online and the media that they share can have both positive and negative impacts towards, not only themselves, but also to other people around them. Young people need to be encouraged to think before they type, and to ask for help and respond wisely.

* Provisional data – figure subject to future revision

Definitions

Bullying

Bullying is defined by the Department of Education and Skills guidelines as unwanted negative behaviour, verbal, psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or group against another person (or persons) and which is repeated over time. Placing a once-off offensive or hurtful public message, image or statement on a social network site or other public forum where that message, image or statement can be viewed and/or repeated by other people is also regarded as bullying behaviour.(Citizens Information - 2017)

 Cyberbullying refers to bullying which is carried out using the internet, mobile phone or other technological devices. Cyber Bullying generally takes a psychological rather than physical form but is often part of a wider pattern of 'traditional' bullying. It can take the form of exclusion, defamation, intimidation, impersonation or sending nasty or threatening messages, emails, photos or video clips; silent phone calls; putting up nasty posts or pictures on a message board, website or chat room; saying hurtful things in a chat room; pretending to be someone else in a chat room or message board or text message and saying hurtful things; or accessing someone's accounts to make trouble for them (Get With It, 2012).

Revenge Porn

Revealing or sexually explicit images or videos of a person posted on the Internet, typically by a former sexual partner, without the consent of the subject and in order to cause them distress or embarrassment.

Purpose of the policy

This policy outlines the importance of educating students and the need to raise awareness on the issues of cyberbullying and the devastating effects of revenge porn. Though Cyberbullying and its effects have only come to the forefront in the national conversation recently, it is evident this has been an issue affecting the youth of Ireland for some years. Furthermore, it advocates the need for policy on cyberbullying at a local level by Students' Unions and Higher Education Institutions.

USI Cyber Bullying Charter:

What behaviour you expect online

- *To be treated with respect and consideration.*
- *To be supported and helped should you need it*
- *Not to be scammed, hacked or have personal details shared without your permission*

What behaviour is expected of you online

- *That you treat others with respect and consideration*
- *That you are mindful of the human behind the computer*
- *To support those who need it as you would do in 'real life'*

Training, Awareness and Education:

Aims

To assist local Students' Union Officers in their work on raising awareness of cyberbullying and with students who are victims of cyberbullying.

To provide information about cyber-bullying that educates students to think before they type, or share illicit content without consent and to intervene if they see a peer being victimised on the internet.

Actions

USI will:

- Ensure a training module is provided for all Students' Union Officers on cyber-bullying.
- Assist SU Officers in investigating the possibility of working together to provide training on cyber-bullying to staff and class representatives.
- Co-ordinate an online cyber-bullying campaign, targeted at third level students and to continuously build on it.
- To run an information campaign on how to look after your mental health while online and how to deal with the negative effects it may have on your wellbeing.
- Include information and resources on the identification, prevention, response and reporting of cyber-bullying.
- Work closely with a range of youth organisations that are working on this topic and build on existing partnerships.
- Survey third level students on the instances and effects of cyberbullying and to present the results to Minister for Education and the Joint Oireachtas Committee

on Transport and Communications in relation to abuse of social media, revenge porn and cyberbullying.

- Lobby for introduction of specific legislation for those affected by cyberbullying and revenge porn.

Local Policy:

Aim: To ensure Students' Unions across the country have a cyberbullying policy for instances when a students will bring a case to their Students' Union attention.

Actions:

USI will:

- Support Member Organisations (MOs) in developing a cyberbullying policy for their Union.
- To provide support and guidance to MOs to bring said policy to their Governing Authority for adoption and to add on to existing policies covering bullying and harassment.

Responsibility for the Cyberbullying Policy

Unless otherwise stated, USI Officer Board is responsible for the implementation of the USI Cyber Bullying Policy. The USI Welfare Officer shall provide any support needed by MOs to implement their own Cyberbullying policies.

This policy will be reviewed at the end of each academic year by USI Officer Board and any changes will be subject to approval by National Council.

References:

1. 'Action Plan On Bullying' – Report of the Anti-Bullying Working Group to the Minister for Education and Skills (2013) Available at: http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Action-Plan-On-Bullying-2013.pdf

2. Donegan, Richard. (2012) Bullying and Cyberbullying: History, Statistics, Law, Prevention and Analysis. The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications, 3(1), 33-42.

3. 'Get With It – A Guide to Cyberbullying'. A joint initiative by the Office for Internet Safety, O2, Barnardos and the National Centre for Technology in Education (2012)

4. National Suicide Research Foundation Ireland – Suicides in Republic of Ireland from 2001-2011. Available at: http://www.nsrf.ie/cms/?q=node/36

5. Sameer Hinduja & Justin W. Patchin, (2010), Cyberbullying: Identification, Prevention, and Response. Available at: http://www.cyberbullying.us/Cyberbullying_Identification_Prevention_Response_Fact_Sheet.pdf

6. Trinity College Dublin – Respect & Dignity Policy Available at: http://www.tcd.ie/about/policies/respect.php

7. Murphy et al. (2011) USI Mental Health Strategy 2010-2013 – 'Student Lives, Minds & Wellbeing'

8. http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/data-on-suicides-nationwide-reveals-sharp-differences-1.2667609

9. http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary_and_post_primary_education/attendance_and_discipline_in_schools/bullying_in_schools_in_ireland.html#le11ee